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ABSTRACT

Analysis of an informal subculture among school principals reveals the existence of norms and beliefs that may help them function in their jobs. Researchers interviewed all 28 principals in a medium-sized suburban Ohio school district to investigate their informal communications with each other. The norms identified forbid principals to be negative, to boast, or to "carry tales" about each other, and encourage them to be loyal to their own subordinates and to initiate discussion only about important issues. The principals' beliefs about communication concern other principals' trustworthiness and expertise in certain areas, the idiosyncracies of one's own school, the danger of being misperceived as incompetent, the district office's possible disapproval of informal communication, and the principals' own lack of time for such communication. These norms and beliefs help the principals maintain useful and informative patterns of interaction while allaying their anxieties about the unforeseen consequences of informal communication or the loss of face among their peers. (RW)

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The Other Side of the Principalship: An Informal Organization Perspective

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The Other Side of the Principalship: An Informal Organization Perspective

While the study of informal organization is hardly a new idea in the exploration of organizations in general (e.g., Blau and Scott, 1962; Gouldner, 1954; Page, 1946; or Roethlisberger and Dixon, 1939) or in the examination of school organizations in particular (e.g., Wolcott, 1977; Burnett, 1969; Willower, 1968; Iannacone, 1958; or Boyan, 1951), the possibility of investigating specific school administrator subcultures may present an avenue for further inquiry. Recently, viewing a particular school principal subculture as an informal organization, the authors of this paper reported informal grouping and interaction patterns between and among school principals in a small city/suburban school district. The investigators described the functions of such social structure in terms of the occupational socialization of school administrators and informal boundary spanning (Licata and Hack, 1980). The purpose of this discussion is to present additional findings from the authors' study of a school principals' informal system, specifically focusing on certain beliefs and norms of this subculture and their possible consequences for school administrators, school and school district organization.

Methodology

The unstructured scheduled interview, a technique which employs specific questions but allows the interviewer follow-up questions to determine the meaning of the respondents' answers (Denzin, 1970), was the basic means of data collection in the authors study of the principals' informal organization (Hack and Licata, 1980). A sample of all 28 principals in a school district

(19 males, 9 females). Three high school principals, five middle school principals, 17 elementary school principals, a vocational school director, and two principals of schools for emotionally disturbed children participated in the study. These principals worked in a district that the investigators characterized as midwestern, medium-sized, small city/suburban on the outer perimeter of a much larger metropolitan area.

The interviews averaged about 45 minutes and usually took place in the principal's office. Responses to each specific question produced a field of data from which the researchers inductively formed natural clusters of similar responses and subsequent generalizations or conceptual explanations. The researchers clustered data independently at first then compared their generalizations as a means of cross-checking perceptions and analyses. They also reported their generalizations to the principals as a group and criticism from this group provided an additional cross-check mechanism. The following generalizations emerged from these analyses and processes.

Review of Initial Findings

Using socio-metric techniques based on the interview question, "Which principals have you contacted recently for information or advice?", the investigators identified certain grouping and interaction patterns based on verified two-way communication links (e.g., principal 16 named principal 20 as a partner in informal interaction and visa versa). High school principals, middle school principals, and principals of the schools for emotionally disturbed children seemed to form groups and interaction patterns that were somewhat guild-like in nature, reminiscent of formal and informal associations of craftsmen or tradesmen during the middle ages who shared similar professional

competence and the need for mutual aid and protection. Elementary principals seemed to cluster into social patterns that appeared to be somewhat clan-like in structure. Many elementary principals interacted with other elementary principals who had either worked for them as a teacher or assistant principai, or with another principal who shared a common professional mentor or ancestor. Other principals could be described as "loners" or "isolates" with respect to their peer group. They seemed to feel closer relationships to central office personnel rather than their peer group, some possibly owing their position predominantly to sponsorship from the central office.

Two clan-like groups of elementary principals emerged from analyses of the characteristics of group members. The "working principals," as they called themselves, tended to be composed of younger principals who spent very little time as a teacher before becoming a principal. Not unlike the "GASers" described by Griffiths (1963) or "promotable" principals described by Lipham (1960), they expressed career aspirations beyond the principalship and seemed to feel they had a reputation in the district for innovation and upward career mobility. The other group tended to be older, more experienced both as a teacher and principal, and none had aspirations beyond the principalship. While it was tempting to characterize this group as "place bound," "locals," or "noninnovative," a review of the data suggests that they tended to portray themselves as "innovators" or "instructional leaders" about as often as the "working principals".

When asked, "What means or structure do you use in communicating informally with peers?", the principals indicated conversations taking place via chance meetings, telephone conversations and encounters at district-wide meetings and events. These interactions constituted most of the informal interaction

within this subculture and appear consistent with Wolcott's (1973) characterization of the principalship as a verbal culture. Most principals identified relatively particularistic topics of interaction dealing with specific situations and problems, e.g., "... a student expulsion ...," " ... problem with school nurses...," or " ... our school's test scores...." Often, interactions served as a way of cross-checking perceptions to avoid "being caught out on a limb." Because the content of interaction could often be perceived by significant others as being indicative of possible incompetence or subversive activity, these informal interactions tended to be unobtrusive, exclusive, involving diads or triads of trusting peers. While widespread interaction involving most principals was possible given the potential of their informal network or "grapevine," such communication seemed rare and hardly indicative of the routine way this informal system operated.

In response to the question, "Do other grapevines exist in this district and do you have access to them?", principals noted the existence of separate grapevine structures among central office personnel, teachers, parents, noncertified employees and students. "Grapevine" seemed to be a term the principals associated with horizontal or peer communications. "Pipelines" appeared to be their term to describe upward and downward informal interaction ties between various organizational levels, e.g., a particular principal might have an interaction partner who is assistant superintendent or visa versa. Interaction via pipelines usually involved interactors with shared allegiances and selective interaction based on conditional trust. For instance, that principal with a pipeline to the central office understands that the interaction may not be kept totally secret because he knows the assistant superintendent has a certain allegiance to the superintendent; just as the

assistant superintendent realizes that the principal has certain loyalties with respect to his peer group. Still, these communications seemed to be used by the interactors as a means of reducing uncertainty in their everyday lives, a means of cross-checking perceptions to make the consequences of their decisions more predicable.

In summarizing their findings Licata and Hack (1980) noted that virtually all principals had moved to their position from positions as teachers, vice-principals or other professional positions within the district. Not unlike other findings (DESP, 1968), the entire principal group in this district had accumulated a considerable amount of managerial experience (257 years for the 28 principals). Only 22 of these years represented managerial experience gained outside of the district. "In-breeding," seemingly applicable to the principalship at all levels, was seen as a possible factor that tended to nurture the development of clan-like, if not guild-like clusters of principals. This socialization pattern seemed to produce relatively stable peer relationships in the principals' subculture, increasing the ability of individual principals to adapt or adjust to their organizational roles and subsequent stabilization and perpetuation of the local educational system (Wiggins, 1975; Bridges, 1965; and Halpin and Croft, 1960 make a similar point).

Alluding to Thompson's boundary spanning notion (1967), Licata and Hack (1980) characterized grapevines as informal boundary spanning structures. These structures seemed to link institutional, managerial and technical subsystems (Parsons, 1967) or organizational subunits at the same hierarchical levels. Principals with pipelines to key opinion leaders in the community have access to data which may assist in buffering the school's instructional core with respect to demands and input changes from the external environment.

Those principals with grapevine links to other principals might compare notes about possible district-wide policy changes as a way of improving their school's ability to adapt or adjust to such changes. "Trailbaloons," e.g., a principal mentions to certain teachers that an increase in teacher supervision duties is being considered and then awaits and analyzes the response from the teacher group before actually making a decision, was described as an informal boundary spanning structure between the role of principal and the teacher subculture which reduces the risk of making certain decisions.

Definition of Terms

The remainder of this paper deals with the 28 principals' responses to the following two types of questions: "What kinds of situations do you interact with peers about; what kinds would you not interact about?" and "What factors would inhibit informal exchange of information between principals?" Given the unstructured interview technique and the freedom to followup, respondents' answers tended to focus on both routine and stressful situations. Responses to these two questions seemed to reflect certain norms and beliefs of that subculture. The responses about what things could or should not be discussed seemed to give insight with respect the normative dimensions of this informal system. The question about possible inhibitors somehow got the principal naturally talking about their means-ends beliefs about the utility and operation of their informal system. Before continuing, it may be useful to define specifically the terms "norms" and "beliefs" as they are used in the rest of this discussion.

Norms are informal standards for beha ior within a particular system or culture (not the behavior itself). Norms are based on cultural values and enforced through systemic sanctions (rewards and punishments). Punishment

for deviation and rewards for conformity are often subtle and difficult to detect, but usually result in a degree of social order (Broom and Selznick, 1961). For example, Lortie (1975, 1973 and 1964) and Packard (1976) have described an autonomy norm within the teacher subculture which favors an absence of a close survailance of teacher work. The norm of teacher autonomy values the teacher as the legitimate authority over classroom matters such as student motivation, instructional techniques, student discipline and evaluation. No member of the professional staff, fellow teacher or administrator, may undermine this authority. Violation of this norm often results in informal pressures or negative sanctions ranging from a frown to verbal reproofs in certain cases. Instead of teacher norms, this paper focuses on possible norms of the principals' informal system or subculture.

Beliefs are expectations held by an individual or a group of individuals that a given means leads to one or more ends or consequences. The results may be either positive or negative, desired or undesired (Campbell, Bridges and Nystrand, 1977; also see Thompson, 1967). For example, Malinowski (1948) noted a belief among Trobriand islanders that certain maritime ritual would provide protection on highly dangerous fishing expeditions. In a more contemporary sense with respect to school organizations, Lortie (1975) has described "equality" beliefs among teachers. Teachers apparently believe that teaching is a complex and intricate, highly personal process; that teachers do not differ in teaching ability; and that as such, teaching is not amenable to evaluation. This belief appears congruent with the teacher autonomy norm. Wolcott (1973) noted the belief among principals that formal educational administration preparation programs are often irrelevent to effective practice in school administration. Somewhat paradoxically, they tended to see education's

efficacy in terms of its potential for others rather than themselves. This paper attempts to further explore the beliefs of the principals' informal system or subculture.

Norms

Table 1 summarizes generalizations of the 28 principals responses with respect to possible norm of their informal system. They are not presented as the only norms, but simply those suggested by the data field derived in this inquiry. Table 1 lists each norm, the norms social meaning in that particular system and a sample response from the data field that might be considered indicative of the norm or generalization. It may be important to note that these norms reflect informal standards for behavior relative to these principals' peer interaction patterns.

(table 1 goes about here)

The anti-negativism norm, mentioned and modeled by many of the principals, prohibited pessimism and encouraged optimism in peer conversations and conversations with others. While it was possible for principals to discuss an item of dissatisfaction on occasion, to be seen as a constant "griper" or "complainer" probably evoked certain negative sanctions from the peer group. As one principal said, "There is not much that is taboo, except being negative all the time." Perhaps the stimulus intense professional environment, the already abundant amount of criticism from various sectors may lead principals to at least within their own subculture reduce negativism as much as possible. Further, one would also suspect that the constant pessimist's competence or ability to adjust effectively may eventually come into question among the peer group members.

The big issue norm suggests to principals that some issues are more important than others and that only the most important need be discussed in informal interaction with peers. One principal noted that the question of whether or not to allow teachers to serve beer at the faculty's spring picnic was causing him much stress. When the researcher asked whether or not this issue was discussed with peers, he said "... no, it is not important enough for that." On the other hand, the norm suggested that when a principal did get a call for advice, it must be pretty important and merit immediate attention. Like the boy that cried wolf too often; to call peers often might be fine for beginning principals, but too many calls about relatively routine matters may eventually lead peers to apply certain negative sanctions in the form of subtle questions about that persons competence and common sense.

One principal with a reputation as the "jester" of the principals sub-culture told of erecting a large sign in front of his elementary school declaring it the best in the region. Even with this person's reputation for comic relief, the principal noted that "... I really got flak from my peers." Another principal noted peer pressure that came to bear on her for public comments she made to the superintendent about how well her school was doing in implementing a mandated curriculum change. The researchers called this prohibition of bragging or boasting and the encouragement of humility among principals the anti-boasting norm. Possibly, the peer group objected more to the implicit and often unintended negative result of the boasting for themselves rather than the positive results that were accrued for the person boasting or his school.

"I might make my teachers look bad by discussing their problems with

other principals. I've got to maintain loyalty to the teachers. Then again, there's always the danger a teacher could move to another school and find out what I've said about them." These sentiments were indicative of responses by many principals that suggested an internal loyalty norm. Part of the rationale for the norm seemed to be an authentic feeling that such behavior was morally cor ect and an expectation held by principals and teachers alike; another part was concern for the danger of what might be called a "communicative backlash or boomarang effect," i.e., a principal informally says something negative about someone and that someone finds out about it and confronts that principal. This last "backlash or boomarang" factor might also explain parts of the rationale for the anti-negativism norm and the next normative dimension in our discussion, the anti-talebearer norm.

Several principals noted fine distinction between informally exchanging information of mutual interest and gossiping or bearing tales. This distinction seemed to be that occasional interactions of this sort were acceptable, but the perception by peers that this was a routine feature of a particular principal's informal interactions might result in that principal being negatively typed a "gossip" or a "talebearer". For instance, during the study one principal sufferred a heart attack and there was much concern and informal discussion about her condition. On the other hand, specific principals known to be gossips could be expected to try to keep conversation about this kind of issue going long after its basic elements had been thoroughly discussed in the subculture. In a condescending tone, one principal noted that "... if you want information circulated quickly, tell Jim (not the real name)."

Beliefs

Noted in table 2, the authors have summarized the responses of the 28

principals with respect to possible beliefs of their informal system. These are not presented as the only beliefs nor as formal definitions, but simply as general descriptions of the principals' belief structure relative to peer communications. Again, table 2 lists each belief, the social meaning of that belief and a sample response from the data field which might be considered indicative of the belief or generalization.

(table 2 goes about here)

To a degree principals expressed the view that each particular school context is relatively unique and that advice from outsiders about the school operation is necessarily limited in value by the outsiders' lack of knowledge about these unique features. Responses like, "Sometimes others advice is not useful. Others do not have an understanding of your building," reflected this belief in contextual idiosyncracy. A less particularistic manifestation of this belief tended to focus on occupational specialization, "Some high school principals are very open, but some have the attitude that 'I'm a high school principal - you're elementary so we've got nothing in common'."

With respect to peers, principals seemed to believe that there was considerable variation in expertise among their colleagues and that certain principals had more valuable information about specific areas of school operation than others. "I go to Pete about curriculum problems and Abby about community problems." "Ed is quiet, but a real curriculum expert." While these were specific principals who were regarded by most of their peer group as particularly expert in specific areas of school administration, there was also considerable difference of opinion or preference among principals about which principal to consult about a particular problem. A curriculum expert for a particular principal or subgroup of principals might not be considered an expert in this

area by other principals. This belief in expertise variability was sometimes reminiscent of preferences among race track gamblers for particular "touts" or "tout sheets" predicting the winners of various races.

Some principals felt that the practice of routinely sharing problems informally with peers might lead their peers to suspect incompetence. Principals said that, "I'm sometimes afraid to share my problems. I might look incompetent." Others reported, "Somethings I just would not talk about --- it wouldn't look good." Apparently some topics were thought to be more likely to stimulate this belief about the misperception of incompetence, e.g., discussions about being "chewed out by the superintendent" or perhaps discussion of a constantly reoccuring problem. One principal recalled regular colleague joking about a problem parent, comments like, "How you doing with that parent Fred (followed by laughter)?" The other side of this belief seems to suggest that these principals tended to value the respect of peers (and dread peer questions about their competence).

The belief that interaction via the grapevine could be considered subversive activity by the central office or superintendent tended to inhibit informal communication between and among principals. This is not surprising. Informal organization has long been associated with subversion of organizational processes - recall the "rate buster norm" reported by R thlesberger and Dixon (1939). Possibly, the superintendent's perception of a particular principal as a grapevine participant might be at least as dangerous as being perceived to be negative by peers. Reflecting this belief, principals said, "If the assistant superintendent knew that we (principals) had discussed that problem informally, he would be mad and suspicious of our motives. "Another principal suggested, "The superintendent suspected that I was the one who leaked

that information to the grapevine. He was cool to me for awhile.

"Some principals fink to the central office." "There have been breeches of confidence among principals and things get blown out of proportion." "Some principals are too closely aligned with the central office. I question their motives and wouldn't trust them with most things." These comments seemed to suggest a belief among principals in trust variability. That is, the belief that certain principals can be trusted to keep informal interactions confidential while others were more suspect. Perceived close associations of a specific principal with superiors or central office apparently lead to a reduction of trust and fewer informal interactions. Others thought to be "talebearers" (routine violators of the anti-talebearer norm) were also relatively unpopular interaction partners according to this belief. The belief is congruent with earlier findings (Licata and Hack, 1980) that these principals tended to interact routinely in exclusive diads or triads of trusting peers.

The belief that time is scarce and that as a result principals often do not have the opportunity to informally interact with other principals was suggested in the following responses, "I don't have the opportunity to call others that much; there's not enough time; too much trouble calling." "Don't have time - anyway I like to play it close to the vest - so that kind of interaction (grapevine) really is worth it to me." Earlier findings suggested that principals informally interact during chance meetings, phone calls, district meetings and events. These reported means for interaction seem to be of the type one would expect when system participants honor a time scarcity belief (Licata and Hack, 1980).

Latent Dysfunction Avoidance

Merton's (1968) paradigm on functional analysis suggests that items for analysis must necessarily be standardized (patterned and repetitive) structural features of a particular system. Functions are those observed consequences of social structure that make for the adaption and adjustment of a system; dysfunctions are observed consequences that tend to reduce or inhibit adaption and adjustment. Manifest functions are recognized, intended or anticipated outcomes; latent functions are unrecognized, unintended or unanticipated by the participants in a system. While the limitations and criticisms of this conceptual framework are well documented (e.g., Stinchcombe, 1968; or Homans, 1964), functional analysis may have some unity in terms of describing the consequences of the norm and belief structures of this principal subculture for the role of principal in particular and school organization in general.

Gouldner's (1954) discussion of the norms, beliefs and myths of a miners' subculture asserted that such structure could be understood in terms of its ability to allay the miners' anxieties about the dangers of the mine. For instance, miners believed that the rats in the mine know when the roof is coming down and at such times the rats head for the shaft. The belief in a "talking roof" or sounds from the roof that precede a collapse suggested that there would sometimes be warning enough so that the miners could escape; the same kind of warning manifest in the rats leaving the mine. Norms about group solidarity among miners seemed to suggest that in times of danger miners could depend on one another for help and support. In the example noted earlier in this paper, the belief among Trobriand islanders that certain maritime ritual would protect them on dangerous fishing trips tended to reduce their anxieties about perils they had little direct control over (Malinowski,

1948), Lortie's (1975) school teachers' sentiments about work appeared to reduce certain endemic uncertainties about their profession and their work environment.

Implicit, if not explicit in the responses of the principals were some uncertainties and anxieties associated with informal interaction. While informal interaction by principals can be understood in terms of its functional aspects (i.e., socialization and informal boundary spanning outcomes that make for more predicable organizational life), principals seem to understand that there are certain risks that may be concurrently assumed with the benefits of informal interaction. For instance, a principal might informally discuss a problem teacher with a peer to get helpful advice, but in getting that advice there is always the risk that the conversation will get back to that teacher or that the peer may leave questioning the principal's competence. The prohibition of talebearing appears to reduce the possibility that informal interaction will result in an unintended rumor or misunderstanding that could cause a principal or a group of principals much anxiety. As one principal said, "... (as a result of misunderstandings and rumors) some innocent people have been slaughtered and that's unfair." Belief in trust variability suggests that by carefully selecting interaction partners one can avoid "blabbermouths" and the unintended anxiety that would result from a breech of confidentiality.

The norms and beliefs discussed in this paper may allay or reduce principals' anxieties about the possible latent dysfunctions (unintended, if not unrecognized and unanticipated negative consequences) of informal peer interaction. They appear to be social structures that apply a degree of control over certain unwanted outcomes of informal interaction, outcomes over which individual principals may feel they have very little direct control.

While the avoidance of latent dysfunctions of informal interaction and subsequent reduction of anxiety probably only in part explain the outcomes of principals' norms and beliefs about informal interaction, this paper will explore two aspects of these phenomena: nurturance of face and the blindside mentality.

Nurturance of Face

As a result of initial analysis of this principal subculture (Licata and Hack, 1980), informal peer interaction seemed to produce relatively stable peer relationships, an increase in the ability of individual principals to adapt and adjust to their organizational roles and support in becoming a principal and in maintaining the position (also see Wolcott, 1973; or Griffiths, 1963). A principal's peer group appeared to play a role in helping him develop a degree of control over career mobility. Peers also provided information necessary in reducing initial uncertainties of the work environment. To lose face (Goffman, 1967 or 1963), among one's peers as a latent dysfunction of informal interaction: to appear incompetent; to appear disloyal to those one works with; to be seen as a gossip or talebearer; to be viewed as someone who "cries wolf" too often; to appear negative or pessimistic; or to be seen as being overly competitive or boastful, is most probably an unintended negative outcome of peer interaction dreaded by many principals in this study.

Loss of face among peers can be viewed as a possible latent or unintended dysfunction of peer interaction. When a principal talks informally to peers about his problems, peers may give helpful advise or interpersonal support, but depending on the topic of interaction peers may sometimes leave questioning that principal's competence or ability to remain positive or loyalty to others. As an example, one middle school principal who was thought to have problems running his school soon stopped coming to informal luncheons with other middle

school principals in our sample. While we have no direct evidence that the image of incompetence was at least in part a result of informal interaction with peers or that his absence was due to a perceived loss of face, both remain plausible possibilities. Another principal who was described as, a loner based on sociometric analysis (Licata and Hack, 1980), noted that other principals did not like him because he had informally, and formally criticized the principal and faculty he had previously been working with as an assistant principal. It is quite possible that such behavior might have been perceived by peers as violations of the anti-talebear norm, the internal loyalty norm, possibly the anti-negatisism norm and as such did little to nurture a positive face among peers. Since this person was promoted to a principalship after this conflict, one can only conclude that loss of face and alienation from one's peers does not necessarily mean that such perceptions will accrue with those who have the power to promote in the central office.

As a means of avoiding the loss of face or anxiety about loss face, there appears to be some natural mechanisms in the principals' belief system that give or nurture face. For instance, the belief in contextual idiosyncracy gives each principal the possible reputation of being expert or competent, even if it is only with respect to the context of a particular principalship. Commonly held beliefs in expertise and trust variability point principals to those peers who may be least likely to misinterpret an informal interaction or set in motion undesired and unintended consequences of such interaction. The very act of selecting a particular peer for advice gives face to that peer by symbolically showing confidence in that peer's expertise and ability to be considered trustworthy. Avoiding members of the principal subculture thought low in expertise and trustworthiness can be

accomplished without taking face from these individuals by simple reference to the time scarcity belief, "I am sorry Sam I'd like to chat with you some more, but I'm really running behind in my schedule."

While informal interaction probably plays a relatively positive or functional role in the lives of these principals, the norms of this principal subculture seem to provide social guides for behavior which reduce the possible unintended risks to face inherent in such interaction. These norms (and beliefs) tend to reduce or suggest reduction in the possibility that one will lose face as a result of informal interaction, provide informal warnings from those who might act inappropriately, and mechanisms which allow selective and exclusive interaction while giving face to some and saving face for others. As such they tend to nurture face and a degree of control over informal interaction and its consequences.

The Blindside Mentality

Most automobile drivers understand that even though they have a left-side, rear-view mirror, there exists a natural blindspot to their rear in which another automobile might be hidden. Football players covering kickoffs and punts also understand the notion of a blindside in which opponents may hide before delivering an unexpected and sometimes painful block. In addition to actual physical blindspots experienced by automobile drivers and football players, some have suggested that things like pride and ambition can create dangerous blindsides to reason and judgement. George Armstrong Custer's pride and ambition are often noted as possible pyschological blindspots which made him vulnerable to disaster at the Little Big Horn. While most people seem to understand the dangers of the blindside in general, numerous automobile accidents, frequent knee injuries among football players covering kicks (even among veteran players), or a military disaster like the one experienced by

Custer, seem to suggest that particular or specific blindsides are much more difficult to uncover.

The principals in this study seemed to understand that participation in informal interaction with peers could result in unintended consequences, e.g., lose of face as noted above, negative sanctions from the central office over the appearance of possible subversive activities or criticism from peers over alledged disloyalty to one's own or for bothering peers with "little issues." Such latent dysfunctions suggest a possible blindside to informal interaction that principals seem to acknowledge. Their fears about the blindside, the felt difficulty in predicting specific dangers, and the prossibility or probability of " . . . getting slaughtered ..." might be viewed as a blindside mentality among principals in this subculture. Subsequently, norms and beliefs about informal interaction may be social structures which tend to reflect principals' uncertainty about possible unforeseen dangers of such blindspots and reduce or allay anxieties related to this blindside mentality.

Recall Wolcott's (1973) description of an elementary principal's fear of the "nonevent, something that did not occur during Wolcott's ethnography, like a call from the superintendent in which the superintendent says that he has become aware of a problem in the principal's school, may be an example of the blindside mentality. In this context, norms like anti-talebearer or internal loyalty and belief in trust variability or expertise variability tend to reduce fears about unanticipated and damaging consequences of informal interaction through normative pressures that seem to inhibit these outcomes.

These norms and beliefs cannot totally protect principals from blindside dangers any more than norms and beliefs among miners can protect miners from cave-ins. While these norms and beliefs tend to reduce anxiety about blind-

side perils, it may be important to note that the blindside mentality is probably an essential feature of principals' understanding of their work context, possibly as necessary as miners understanding that they must be alert to cave-ins. This point is underlined when one considers that a recent inquiry focusing on the managerial behavior of secondary school principals (Willower and Martin, 1981) noted that over 27% of their time was consumed by unscheduled events.

Conclusion

The description of possible norms and beliefs presented in this paper are probably not anymore complete, definitive or comprehensive than the notion that the consequences of such social structure can be understood in terms of a normative attempt to reduce or eliminate the latent (or unintended) dysfunctions of informal interaction. Certainly, the generalizations about norms and beliefs and about the nurturance of face and the blindside mentality are only presented here as specimens for analysis in the light of future investigation. The sample size, the limitations of interview questions as the only means for data collection, the nature of the questions and possible external validity concerns suggest caution in generalizing the tentative findings and sometimes speculative analyses of data described in this paper.

While the principals' informal organization was the focus of this inquiry, it is important to note that there is little data to suggest that informal interaction with peers is an important aspect of principals' everyday life. If anything, the opposite may be indicated in many cases. Still, the data and analyses from this study seem to provide some initial insight into the informal or "other side of the principalship." Additional

insight can be gained only through further and expanded investigation, something that is presently in process with urban principals (see Johnson, 1981) and which may be of interest to others studying the role of principals in school organizations.

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Table 1. Norms of the Principal Subculture

Norms	Social Meaning	Sample Response
Anti-Negativism Norm	Prohibits pessimism and encourages optimism as a patterned and repetitive aspect of interaction with peers and even others outside of their subculture.	"There is not much that is taboo, except being negative all of the time."
Big Issue Norm	Encourages principals to predominantly interact with peers about relatively important issues and discourages the frequent initiation of discussion about less important issues.	"They (other principals) are not interested in my routine problems, I wouldn't bother someone unless it was a very important situation."
Anti-Boasting Norm	Prohibits principals from bragging or boasting about their performance or their school and supports humility as a valued characteristic of principals.	"I once put a sign up in front of my school saying it was the best school in the district. I really got flack from my peers."
Internal Loyalty Norm	Encourages principals to behave in ways that demonstrate their loyalty to people who work in their schools and discourages principals from public criticism of their faculty members and students.	"I wouldn't share personal problems that a teacher in my school is having. It's protecting one's own."
Anti-Talebearer Norm	Prohibits principals from using rumors or gossip as a patterned and repetitive aspect of interaction with peers and even others outside of their subculture.	"I value people and their right to privacy. I am not a carrier of tales."

Table 2. Beliefs of the Principal Subculture

Belief in ---	Social Meaning	Sample Response
Contextual Idiosyncracy	Each principal's work context is unique and external advice is not as helpful as knowledge of the school's special features.	"Sometimes others advice is not useful. Others do not have an understanding of your building."
Expertise Variability	Some principals are better sources of expertise than others. Some are experts on certain areas and not so on other areas; so selectivity is advised in seeking assistance.	"I go to Pete (not real name) about curriculum and Abby (not real name) about community problems."
Misperception of Incompetence	It is hazardous to discuss problems with others because such discussion might incorrectly lead them believe you are incompetent.	"I'm afraid to share problems - I might look incompetent."
Grapevine as Subversive Activity	Many central office officials, peers and others associate some forms of grapevine interaction with being subversive; one must be careful about informal interaction.	"If the assistant superintendent knew that we (principals) had discussed that problem informally, he would be mad or suspicious of our motives."
Trust Variability	Some principals can be trusted to keep informal interaction confidential to a greater degree than others; so care should be used in selecting interaction partners.	"Some principals are blabber mouths and can't keep things to themselves."
Time Scarcity	Principal's are busy people with little time to give or seek advice; thus grapevine interaction is limited by time available for such activity.	"I don't have the opportunity to call others that much; there's not enough time; too much trouble calling."